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A  
City  
Woman  
Who Found  
Her  
War Job  
On a  
Farm



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# A Woman Who Needs You

by

REINETTE LOVEWELL

WHEN we went into the war last spring, old Mrs. Hastings on Elm Street, who had been bed-ridden for years, astonished her family by getting up and planting a war garden. Mrs. F. D. Rothingham, who used to glisten with jewelry morning, noon, and night, walked into Sam Hawkins's store one day and stripped it all off on the counter.

"Give me what it's worth," she told Sam. "It's going to help the Red Cross!"

All of us went in strong for service clothes—overalls and khaki, arm-bands and military-looking hats, and we started half a dozen organizations. Knitting-bags blossomed every day from one end of the town to the other.

Vida Hollanden went straight to New York. I had a feeling she would keep on to Paris, for Vida has money and can do a lot of things the rest of us can't. We were all surprised when she came back home in June.

I ran right over, expecting to see her in some sort of a uniform, but she was out on the porch in her last summer's voile and a floppy hat with cornflowers round the brim.

"I thought sure you'd get over to France," I told her. "Tom's still there, isn't he?"

Tom is her cousin—a doctor. He went across for a two months' vacation in 1914, and has stayed there ever since, working.

"Yes, he's working his head off," she told me. "I'd have gone, but he says that Europe is overrun with women who are just underfoot. They don't know how to do any one thing—any more than I do."

I could see Vida was terribly in earnest—she's that kind—and she looked sort of pale and worn out.

"I volunteered for every sort of service I could think of," she went on. "But, oh, I don't know—I just couldn't feel it was get-

ting anywhere. The sickening part of it all is I never had any training to fit me to do any real work."

Before I went home she asked me to go motoring with her the next day.

We made an early start, and Vida seemed more like her old self. She was awfully interested in the farms we passed.

"They certainly are planting a lot more this year," she pointed out, "and raising food is the biggest job we've got on our hands, there's no question about it."

Forty miles or so up the river we came to one of those places where there are barns and barns and more barns, with a bare-looking house that needed to be painted.

Vida stopped the car and said she was going to try and buy some milk.

I got out with her and we went around the side of the house to the back door. There was a woman on a little porch washing in two wooden tubs, and a two-year-old baby was playing with a puppy on the steps.

The woman had a towel bound round her head and she was an awful, green, sick-head-ache color.

"Oh, my dear," Vida burst out, just like that. "I know you don't want to be bothered. I just stopped to see if we could buy some milk."

There was a lot of clothes wrung out in a tin pan, and Vida began pulling off her gloves.

"Can't I hang these out for you?" she offered. "You look so sick."

The woman just stared at her a moment, and two big tears ran down her cheeks. They were the *biggest* tears I ever saw. Then she began to sob, terrible sobs that shook her clear through. When he saw his mother start in, the baby puckered up and cried, too; and, with the suds from the tubs sloshed on the floor, that porch was the wettest place for a while!

Vida was wonderful. She put her arms right around that poor thing, and asked her

what the matter was, and couldn't we help.

It seemed as if, once she began, she couldn't stop crying.

"I've had such an awful day," she shook out finally. "I got up with a splitting headache and everything has gone wrong. I can't get help. I've tried everywhere—advertised and telephoned and written, but it's no use; no girl will touch farm work with a ten-foot pole. I *had* to wash to-day, and the breakfast dishes are still in the sink, and there's the baking to do, and the men coming to dinner in an hour, and a sick child."

Vida looked at me. I saw what she meant and nodded.

"We are going to stay and help," she insisted. "It isn't fair for things to be heaped on you this way."

The woman acted as if she couldn't believe her ears, but Vida was in the kitchen in no time, and had a gingham apron off a nail and round her waist.

We tackled the dishes right then and there—stacks of them, the pan was jammed full—and cooking tins and pots and pans.

"I've four men to feed," she told us. "It is as bad getting farm help outdoors as it is in. The three hired hands my husband's got don't do any more than one ought to—they drink and lay off—but they are awful eaters. Seems as if I couldn't do much but bake."

We had to pump all the water we used with a horrible old pump in the sink and then heat it in the tea-kettle. The stove was across the kitchen and everything inconvenient. All the water for washing had to be lugged out in pails and lifted up into the tubs—enough to break any woman's back. Then the tubs had to be emptied out on the grass.

The name of the family was Rice, and there were four children—two in school and the little boy that was sick, and the two-year-old. But feeding nine people wasn't all—she had to mix stuff for the hens, and two pigs, and a calf twice a day. And it all had to be carried out to them.



While the men were at the table at noon we went upstairs and swept the chambers and made six beds. By the time Mrs. Rice called us to come and eat something, my legs ached so I thought they would drop right off.

"Can't you lie down a while?" Vida commenced urging Mrs. Rice. "What is there to do this afternoon?"

"Do!" Mrs. Rice broke out. "'What is there to *do*?' My dear girl, there's never any let-up in things to do! You've helped a sight, but I've got to keep going every minute till bedtime. There's ironing, the things the children have to have for tomorrow, and the floor to mop up, and the lamps to clean, and the children will come home half starved from school. Then there's supper to get and the milk to attend to——"

Vida held up both hands.

"And it's just like this every day?" she wanted to know.

"It'll be worse before long," Mrs. Rice said, with a kind of a grim smile. "There's stuff to be put up, and haying, and hot weather."

"What can we do next?" I put in.

"If you'd only look out for the children a little while," she said. "Baby's all right, but Benny gets 'fretty alone so much. He's getting better right along, but it takes an awful lot of my time, just running in and out to see how he is."

"How long have you had the place?" Vida wanted to know, as she lifted the baby into her lap.

The prettiest pink flush came over Mrs. Rice's face, and she didn't look like the same woman.

"Nine years," she said. "We'd both saved a little, and Frank had some money left him, so we bought the place and were married out under the tamarack tree in the front yard. We've done real well with the mortgage, and I've always had my mother to fall back on until this year—she died before Christmas. There ain't anybody I can trust the children



with—and she did such a lot of mending and sewing.”

“What time do you get up?” Vida cut in suddenly. She had been sitting with her eyes all squinted up the way she does when she’s studying something.

“We’ve been setting the alarm at quarter of four,” Mrs. Rice said. “My husband gets up then, but it seems as if I could not get my eyes open.”

“*Quarter to four—*” Vida’s tone was horror stricken.

“Well, what can I *do*?” Mrs. Rice flung back. “We can’t give up the place, and there ain’t no help to be had.”

At four o’clock the two older children came home from school in the barge that carried them every day.

A little girl came tearing out to the kitchen.

“I gotta have my pink dress ironed for tomorrow,” she shouted. “My class is going to have a picture taken.”

“It’s out on the line,” Mrs. Rice was telling the youngster, with a real proud-mother look. “I’ll sprinkle it and do it up by the lamplight. You’ll have it all right.”

I did the sprinkling myself, and, the minute it was damp enough, heated the irons and pressed all the little ruffles out. When it was finished, I found Vida out on the grass under a syringa bush with her shoes off.

“My feet are just killing me,” she confided. “I bet I’ve walked ten miles around that house—and my back!”

“When are we going to crank up the car?” I asked her. I was pretty tired myself, and the yellow road down the hill looked good to me. “It’s getting toward supper time and the men are milking.”

“I was just looking up trains,” she said. “There’s a 7.35 that will get you home at 9.30. I’m going to drive you to the depot. I want you to stop in and tell mother I’ve found something to do—real work—*war* work——”

"Why, Vida Hollanden, you don't mean to stay *here*?"

"I do mean to stay here," she shot back. "I'll tell you frankly that I'm not up to the washing and the baking and the lifting pails of water, even if I do weigh fifty pounds more than she does. But I can keep the house in order, and mend, and play with the children. I can take Minnie to the dentist and Benny to the doctor's office. I can help——"

"Suppose she won't want you," I wet-blanketed.

Vida stood up—she's five feet eight or nine, and although she isn't conceited, she wouldn't be a woman if she didn't know what a perfectly splendid-looking thing she is. "I've an idea I compare pretty favorably with any green girl."

Mrs. Rice was coming out with her dress changed. She had that towel off her head and her hair was lovely.

"I want you ladies——" she began when Vida interrupted her.

"Would you like to have me stay with you till fall and help with the children and the lighter work? I've been looking for something to do—and I don't believe anybody or anything about this whole war needs help more than you do with this farm on your hands."

Mrs. Rice didn't say a word, but the tears came—those awful big tears. Vida took one look at her face. Then she turned to me: "Go on home," she ordered, "I've got a job."

## Hands That Can Help

The Department of Agriculture has asked permission to reprint and distribute this story from *The Designer*, because it describes in a very appealing way a form of patriotic service which is easily overlooked. It is a service which must be performed without the thrill of martial music, the excitement of adventure, or even the inspiration of working shoulder to shoulder with a regiment of others enlisted in a common cause; it will lead to no personal gain or glory, and its reward will be merely the consciousness of having done what desperately needed doing. Yet so sincere are our American women in their patriotic devotion that some will surely welcome this suggestion of a way to help, however humbly and indirectly, in the task of the feeding of the nations.

This service is not one that every woman can render, any more than every woman can make Liberty Loan speeches or manage a Red Cross workroom successfully. Each service demands special qualifications of temperament and talent and experience. Vida Hollander must have been equipped with more than good-will, health, and leisure; she must at least have known how to sweep and mend and tend babies, or poor Mrs. Rice would have found her not a help, but a hindrance. And she must have been a person who knew and loved country life well enough to adapt herself to the routine of the farm home, or before the summer was over she would have fretted away her efficiency and lost her enthusiasm in loneliness.

Such a combination of qualifications is surely not impossible among some of the women who are anxious to be of use to the country this summer. Among the college girls, and the teachers, with their vacation leisure, or the women employed in trades which are slack in the summer, there must be some who were brought up in just such coun-

try homes as now need help, and who could be of practical service to the woman on whom the efficiency of the farm workers depends. If these could do as Vida Hollander did, they would contribute to the world's food supply as surely as if they ran tractors or hoed vegetables.

Perhaps, too, there is something to be done by women who would not be of much general help in the country home. In cities, laundry work and baking are largely done outside of the home or by special workers who come in for one kind of work only. Why not more co-operative laundries for rural communities, or at least an organized attempt to get the washing for a group of farm families done somewhere outside of the individual home?

Since almost every farm sends to town once or twice a week, could it not be arranged for the good cooks there to have pies and cakes and cookies baked ready to be taken back when the farmers' business is done? If a town woman can not scrub and cook all summer for a country friend, could she not go regularly to do the mending? Let the women who are good at organizing get together with those who like to do the practical work and with those, who, like the home demonstration agents, know what half the farm homes can use, and something can certainly be done to take part of the work out of those overburdened households. This way of attacking the problem has an advantage which must appeal to the farsighted. Begin now as an emergency measure; it may become a permanent relief and one which will increase the good will and understanding between town and country.



